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TIMOTHEUS

TO-DAY AND TO-MORROW

*For a full list of this Series see at end
of this Book*

TIMOTHEUS

The Future of the Theatre

BY

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Histrionphone, Essays in Biography

"Even the powerful mind of Dr. Johnson seemed foiled by futurity."—BOSWELL

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PREFATORY NOTICE

This booklet is Chapter Twenty-three of a work already largely in being, but of which very little will be published in the reader's lifetime; for though the author has none of that false respect for the wishes of the dead and the privacies of contemporaries which still causes so much avoidable inconvenience in social life, that feeling of delicacy towards posterity, now so active an influence as sometimes to shrink from exposing its members even to existence, hinders his speaking fully.

Being obnoxious to the sufferings of others, he had, in 1915, the good fortune to acquire Mr H. G. Well's Time Machine. Choosing a remote

TIMOTHEUS

corner of our island, and building due safeguards against possible bumps in time—I will not forestall the account given in Chapter Two of his work—he arrived at the year 2,100 (O.S.¹) with no further damage than a slight bruise on his knee caused by the shovel of an archaeologist in search of human remains thought to be of the same period as the Cro-Magnon man.

The details of how the author was greeted, conducted, honoured, and spied upon are not here to be told—much is left to the reader to infer; *verb. sap.*, as we say. But there are two points the latter must bear in mind: the first that there are things the author has bound himself not to divulge, and which will never be known until they

¹ Our Style.

FUTURE OF THE THEATRE

occur : the second, that he has had to rely on his memory alone. A little thought will make the reason plain : although he took copious notes, and these are in existence, they are so only in future time, and will not become available until the year 2,100. This last statement, I fear, bristles with issues, and opens up deep scientific and philosophical questions, involving on the one hand relativity and on the other vitalism, which I have neither the space nor the ability to dispose of. But very vivid in the author's mind is the remembrance of his emotion on first seeing the writing fade backwards out of his notebooks, and becoming bitterly aware that time was a reversible flux. He returned to 1920, a study of history having informed him, as far

TIMOTHEUS

as he could unravel the evidence, that his feelings would be less lacerated in that year than seemed likely in 1915. He then settled down to write his great work, which he will give to the world piecemeal as discretion permits : (the reader has only to glance at our law reports to see that were futurity displayed, the enjoyment of life and that nice adjustment of personal desires to social duties which our time has perfected, could not exist), and I have persuaded him to allow me to make known this chapter on the theatre, which can break no bones, or even abrade the most delicate skin.

I have, indeed, taken the liberty of making some omissions in order to brevity, and, I freely admit, for decency's sake ; for I do not hold with

FUTURE OF THE THEATRE

the modern fashion of protesting that nothing is withheld, and forthwith teasing the reader with a series of dots or stars.

Why the book is called 'Timotheus' will be evident to those who bear in mind the name of the 'Mighty Master,' the Wagner of Alexander the Great's day, who

"Cou'd swell the Soul to Rage, or
kindle soft Desire."

I

THE NATIONAL THEATRE

Our air-taxi landed us at what I took to be the nineteenth floor, and we walked almost at once into a huge hyperboloid pit, the walls of which consisted of tiers of seats. It would hold, I gathered, some twenty thousand people, and much resembled a Roman theatre, except for the peculiar curve of the walls, and the seats continuing to the very bottom of the funnel. There was no sign of any stage, and on my questioning Fabian,¹ he pointed to the saucer-like dome which formed the roof, or lid of the building. I was afraid

¹The author's general guide—*Vergil to his Dante.*

FUTURE OF THE THEATRE

that to keep my eyes fixed upon this airy stage would mean ricking my neck, but I was reassured on being shown the shape of our seats. Not only were they well slanted back, but they were also provided with rests for the head, such as we are familiar with at our barbers' and dentists'; and I was told that with the body in the position proper to the chairs, our emotional apparatus lent itself most readily to suggestion.

I then asked him if the performance was to be a good one, and he replied that "The clutch was officially ranked as A2 for efficiency, but that he did not know what it was for." I was much puzzled as to his meaning until I learnt that 'clutch' was the name given to a drama of the kind about to take place, where everything was under the control

TIMOTHEUS

of one man, the ‘fairfusser’ as he is called, who designs the movement, the emotional sequences, the voices, and whatever else is needed. I laid myself open to much banter on the part of Ierne¹ by asking whether it was to be a tragedy or a comedy: such a crude distinction, she said, was typical of the muddle-headedness of our age, on a level with the antitheses classical-romantic, conservative-liberal, matter-mind, and even intellect-emotion we were so fond of making, and which for absurdity were only equalled by our craze for dressing men and women in different sorts of clothes. The object of a drama, Fabian enlightened me, was to summon up a given state of

¹ The author’s guide in the more intimate social relationships.

FUTURE OF THE THEATRE

being, pure or complex ; and once the fairfusser knew what the clutch was for, it was his business to produce the right emotion. I began to speak of emotion for its own sake, but Ierne hurriedly checked me, saying that I would shock anyone who might overhear, for there was no biological value in emotion for its own sake. This made me think less agreeably of her kindness to me on the last evening.

I was therefore still confused by their speaking of what a clutch was 'for,' as though it might be a sort of charity matinée, and was about to put the question, when the theatre became pitch dark : the clutch was beginning.

At first I was aware only that the roof, or 'stage' had become luminous, the light varying in strength, as it does

TIMOTHEUS

on the ceiling of a room when clouds travel across the sun. Soon it became more steadily bright, and vague human figures began to take shape on it, shadows at first, some of enormous size, advancing and retreating, making wide gestures of an import I could not grasp. Sometimes the shadows would assume solid shape and stand up as live beings, seeming to detach themselves from the dome so as not to appear in the least like those extravagant persons who populate the ceilings of many of our own theatres : and among them was one singularly graceful form which seemed to dominate the rest, and whose motions I could not help following, so great was the pleasure they gave me.

Soon I became conscious that the air of the theatre was pulsating in a

FUTURE OF THE THEATRE

manner which never quite became sound, and in a definite rhythm, which varied occasionally, but yet seemed to conform to the original beat, much as a poet will modulate his verse. Now a faint perfume hit the sense, while an uneasy feeling stole over me, as if something had been done I did not want. Then, from the body of the theatre, as from a member of the audience, a voice spoke, in the tones of a man resigned to grief.

No means at all to hide
Man from himself can find :
No way to start aside.
Out of the hell of mind.

and I felt myself sinking into such an agony of despair as I can remember having gone through only in dreams, or under the influence of supernatural

TIMOTHEUS

fear. Struggle as I might against the weight of oppression, I was forced to abandon myself to the flow of dire tribulation, in which remorse succeeded terror, and all the passions of the world were black. And from all around the theatre, now from here, now from there, above me and below me, sometimes in front and sometimes at my back, I could hear voices and the noise of approaching events. Once I thought a voice cried out :

Desolate, as she is desolate, in ruined cities, and when the sun has gone down to his rest.

and in the midst of a tumult of pulsations and perfumes and shadowy occurrences, a woman whispered, it seemed close by my ear :

And Pity, like a naked, new-born babe.

FUTURE OF THE THEATRE

At that the sense of intolerable woe lightened ; the rhythm changed, the figures appeared human and brave, while joy seemed to issue from the very walls of the theatre with the words :

Love's banners on the battlements of song,

which trickled from every side. At last, without warning, in a triumphant burst of sudden glory such as makes us laugh with active lungs, a loud but harmonious cry resounded from the very middle of the theatre, where there was nothing visible but empty air, calling :

Where are the eagles and the trumpets ?

and I remembered no more till we found

TIMOTHEUS

ourselves perched on the outer landing of the theatre waiting for our taxi to take us home.

It was then that I found myself prey to strange and mingled, but insistent emotions, partly of kindly generosity, and partly of self-sacrifice. Looking at the men and women around me I could see that they too were strongly moved, making gestures foreign to the occasion, such as taking out their pocket-books, searching in them feverishly, and doing sums on slips of paper. Some whom I could see were giving themselves up to despair, and others were arguing with their wives. Fabian then pointed out to me that most of the carriages taking people away from the theatre, instead of flying in all

FUTURE OF THE THEATRE

directions, made for a building upon
which was written large

SUBSCRIBE HERE FOR THE EURBANK
LOAN. OFFICES OPEN.

That, he said, accounted for the clutch. There was a crisis, he continued, in the bank upon which the credit of the League of Europe was founded, and the governments were anxious to sell the scrip of the new loan. The clutch we had seen had, no doubt, been performed that afternoon in the larger towns all over the continent, the language alone being suitably varied ; and by this means the bank would be placed on a firm footing once more. My emotion was damped on learning this, for after all, I could have little interest in the finances of a country in which I had no stake : but enough of

TIMOTHEUS

my feeling was left to make me give a foolishly large tip to the driver of our machine.

I was naturally curious to know by what means the frame of mind had been aroused, and in the evening Fabian was kind enough to enlighten me, going very learnedly into the origins of the form which met with such success. I was very surprised, and not a little proud, to find that a large part of the science had had its starting point in our own day, as he showed from several old books : but he on his part seemed inclined to think we had been wanting in genius to have had so much knowledge to hand, and yet not have been able to use it.

The shape of the theatre had been chosen for acoustic reasons, on account

FUTURE OF THE THEATRE

of certain properties of the hyperbola, which I had not the mathematics to understand, but which, Fabian said, had been utilised in the third (1914-1918) of the five great wars of European settlement, for finding out by their report, the exact post of hidden guns. It was this which had enabled the fair-fusser to make the last cry seem to come from the void ; the other speeches had merely been delivered by variously placed loud-speakers, connected in due turn with a wireless gramophone. I may here say that the phrases I have remembered and written down are only a very small number of those used in the performance, and which, for some reason, seemed familiar. The other words spoken in the clutch were of like great emotive power, chosen or in-

TIMOTHEUS

vented by the fairfusser for this reason alone : and though they may seem to have no logical thread, or connection in real life, their place in the scheme was very carefully thought out. The reasons, and the terminology, for all this were too far advanced for me to be able to hold them in my head, but I have since traced some passages Fabian showed me as early sources of the form, and which will give the reader some idea of the great cleverness of the design.

" Thus the indirect methods of hypnotising, like many of the technical procedures used in making jokes, have the effect of checking certain distributions of mental energy which would interfere with the course of events in the unconscious, and they lead eventually to the same result as the direct

FUTURE OF THE THEATRE

methods of influence by means of staring or stroking.”¹

From there the high road is plain to see ; the phrases of the clutch check or loosen ‘certain distributions of mental energy,’ for art is only a kind of hypnotism : but the perfection which I had ‘felt’ had not been arrived at without much arduous trial. At one time jumbled up words had been tried, or single ones, but even the most striking, such as *death*, or *beauty*, or *ruin*, had not had an effect at all to be put beside that of the shortest sentence. Familiar quotations had also been made use of, but they were put by for two reasons. The first was that all men did not respond in the same way,

¹ Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, page 97.

TIMOTHEUS

since all men are not equally noble, some even finding risible “Tears, idle tears, I know what they mean.” The second was that hardly any quotations were familiar enough to be known by everybody : for example, the words “Till the conversion of the Jews” moved people quite unevenly, some connecting them with religion, others with their pass-books, and a few with an old obscure poem. This, besides preventing many from entering into the proper mood, destroyed that singleness in the audience without which the highest suggestible state cannot be reached : for an emotion is infectious only if the units of the crowd are ready to agree together, as I have often noticed on first nights when the friends of an author try to sweep the critics

FUTURE OF THE THEATRE

away on a tide of noisy enthusiasm. And further, emotion caught on the wing is always stronger than when it is the result of deliberate thought.

As to the shadows on the 'stage,' these were for fixing the attention of all upon the same thing ; and I discovered that every member of the audience had been greatly drawn towards the figure which had seized upon my imagination, and had to some extent made himself one with it, as we now do sometimes with the hero of a play. This had served to transform the loose 'herd' into a unified and thus suggestible 'horde,' if I do not mistake the terms.

The air being made to throb was merely to create a rhythm, the effects of which had been keenly studied.

TIMOTHEUS

Again to copy a passage I have traced :

"Among the results of rhythm susceptibility and vivacity of emotion, limitations of the field of attention, marked differences in the incidence of belief feelings closely analogous to those which alcohol and nitrous oxide can induce . . . may be noted."¹

and I can willingly believe this, for I have myself often felt very curiously stirred when listening to the jazz-band at young people's parties.

The naming of nitrous oxide, or laughing gas as it used to be called, brings me to the perfumes, which, I learnt, were led along each row of seats by what I had taken for hot-water pipes. This again, Fabian said, was a legacy of the third (1914-1918) Great

¹ I. A. Richards, *The Principles of Literary Criticism*, page 143.

FUTURE OF THE THEATRE

War of European Settlement, and he gave me to read an account I have since recovered of a gas which caused "the most appalling mental distress and misery."¹ Of course the means had been much refined, and the fairfusser could at will set free gases which brought about sorrow, fear, joy, shame, the love of glory or of animals, and indeed any emotion, all without the least risk of harm; though it is true that some serious mishaps, especially in the early stages, had unluckily happened.

The combined result was that almost any feeling, and any required degree of that feeling, could be produced by the fairfusser, and this the government found of the greatest use at times of

¹ J. B. S. Haldane, *Callinicus*.

TIMOTHEUS

political or European crisis, when wars were to be declared or averted, or any controversial measure passed.

I was bound to utter my high admiration of the lengths to which the art of the drama had been carried, and made so salutary an influence, though I could not help doubting whether such a tool in the hands of rulers might not be a little dangerous : but I was assured that this had already been foreseen, and that the national theatres were closed during the period of a general election, and of debates of high moment, such as those on the budget.

I asked if there were no theatres in which human beings came upon the stage and strutted and talked after the manner of common life, as they do to-day, and I was told that there were

FUTURE OF THE THEATRE

many kinds : but that before going to see them I would be taken to the Dramatic Academy, which had been handsomely endowed by an Anglo-Caucasian millionaire. I thought I should learn more of the trend of the art by going there than by attendance at a number of theatres, and gladly consented to the proposal.

II

THE DRAMATIC ACADEMY

This academy is not an entire single building, but a continuation of several houses on both sides of a street, which, growing waste (owing to changes in fashion), was purchased and applied to that use. I was received very kindly by the warden, and went for many days to the academy.

This was composed in three parts ; one for research professors, another for play-makers, or fairfusser, and the third for students ; the first being trained psychologists, the last, young men and women remarkable for beauty, fine feeling and intelligence, as they are

FUTURE OF THE THEATRE

in our own day. The notion was for the professors to find out facts, for the fairfusser to apply them, and for the students to carry them out : and if it may occur to the reader that the workers in one side paid small heed to the discoveries of the rest, a little consideration will show that this is all to the good ; for slavishly to accept the opinions of others can never lead to clarity of thought, and the warden was anxious to maintain in every inmate that active spirit of self-reliance without which no advance can be made in any of the sciences. I saw many of each division, but to write of them all would be to take up inordinate space , in these memorials, since the arts are not of large importance to the state or to the public. I shall, therefore, confine

TIMOTHEUS

myself to describing one or two of each kind, choosing those which throw most light on the methods of those days, and the great progress we can shortly expect.

My first visit was to a small, active professor, with a tiny clean-shaven chin, and unusually bright weasel eyes, who, speaking very fast, and with vivid gesture, easily convinced me of the usefulness of his discoveries. He had applied his mind for fifteen years to proving that there was no such thing as thought, for, he said, the conversation he had to listen to, or the acts he was able to observe, could be accounted for without supposing such a thing existed. Speech, he explained, was merely a habit, like that of scratching when something causes our skin to

FUTURE OF THE THEATRE

itch ; and, moreover, all our deeds were like scratching, which we do thoughtlessly, however much we may flatter ourselves that we prepare great things far ahead. He did not go to the lengths of some of his colleagues, who denied the existence of consciousness : for, so as not to be too positive, he preferred to regard ' awareness of the emotions ' as a fiction convenient to his purpose, or, to put it differently, as words merely to describe a sequence of events. By his system, when impulses are set up, something occurs, such as eating, and we are ' satisfied,' as we say : or we are ' disappointed,' as when prevented from a kindly action.

I paid close heed to this part of his discourse, because he begged me not

TIMOTHEUS

to confuse his theory with that of a rival professor, who believed that allusive gestures gave rise to a corresponding emotion. This, he pointed out, was merely the out-of-date heresy that “A dog does not wag his tail because he is happy ; but that he is happy because his tail wags.” This rival believed that if he made the gestures which usually go with certain emotions, he would undergo these feelings ; and the spectators would, by ‘in-feeling’ or ‘empathy’ (such were his barbarous terms) put their muscles in readiness to go through these movements, and so, in their turn, experience these emotions. For his part, when he had been to see this professor acting woe, far from feeling unhappy, he had barely been able to master his mirth. But, so

FUTURE OF THE THEATRE

as to give the theory a fair trial, he had wished with one of his pupils to observe the result of moving the tail of a dog quickly from side to side, but that unluckily, the pupil had been bitten before the experiment had reached a stage from which anything could be learnt.

His own idea, he informed me, was to set up a known order of stresses and strains in the watchers' nerves, and this could be done by cunning movements performed in front of them. I was not, however, to tax him with inconsistency, for his motto was 'Not miming but movement,' and though an actor had to use gestures, they must by no means be after the naif manner of his rival. He himself had spent over four years in the abstract study of the

TIMOTHEUS

movements proper to the passion of benevolence—abstract, because nothing is more misleading than what people relate of their own feelings : cruelty, for instance, they often describe as a wish to better their neighbours. Indeed, another of his mottoes, he declared chuckling, was ‘No motion, no emotion’; and I could not but agree with him when I considered that after all, to lie in one’s bed all day and simply ‘think,’ as we stupidly call it, is no life at all.

Yet I could not help trying to argue, feebly enough, that the showing of dreadful acts would call forth feelings of horror, as we may judge from the murder of Desdemona, and that fitting words would arouse pity in us, as they do in the same play. But, smiling at

FUTURE OF THE THEATRE

the clumsiness of my example, he remarked that just there lay the error ; for if we were truly to see a Moor, however splendid, plunging a knife into the body of a beautiful lady, our emotions, if we knew her to be guiltless, would be very different from those we feel in a theatre ; and that, instead of sitting still, we should most certainly interpose, or run to fetch the police. Again, while we were children, before our minds are distorted by what we erroneously call thought (but which is only an idle luxury-habit), Mr Punch beating his wife causes us to laugh very loudly. This instance, he said, would also prove how much more useful movements were than words, since for ten who would laugh at a Punch and Judy show, hardly one would smile at

TIMOTHEUS

the wittiest things in Pascal. It was only on reflection that I could altogether make his views my own, for it is not easy for us to give up opinions we have held ever since we can remember.

To test the movements appropriate to various emotions, this professor had invented a machine, which, by reason of the changes in electrical resistance a body undergoes under the action of the passions, recorded the feelings of any person subjected to it. This machine he had just brought to perfection, and to give me a demonstration, he sat me in a chair made of some amalgam unknown to me, and fitted with sockets into which my head, hands and feet were clamped. A piece of wireless apparatus, supplied with a diaphragm such as make a part of our

FUTURE OF THE THEATRE

telephone receivers, was placed over my heart, and, my loins being bared, my lumbar vertebrae were played upon by a peculiar ray. Above my head, where I could not see it, was placed a marker, much like our telegraph morse-code dials, but corrugated and rayed after the manner of a fan. The professor could watch this while evolving before me the strange movements I could connect with nothing I had ever seen, and so could vary his gestures according to the results shown. After about a quarter of an hour of erudite passes, the professor, wiping the sweat from his brow, triumphantly announced the successful issue of his experiment, and asked me what emotion I felt. At that moment, having overcome my awe, I was filled with a profound sense of

TIMOTHEUS

pity, and on my confessing this, the professor danced with glee. Crying "Typical! Typical!" he pointed at the dial; but as the needle showed 'Lust tempered with Sentimentality' I could not but feel that his wonderful invention needed alteration in a few details to perfect it. Nevertheless, while doing up my braces, I framed a few remarks to make known my pleasure at seeing the drama make such strides in his hands; and promising to meet at a later day we parted with many expressions of esteem. I must also add this tribute to his ability: when I did visit him again, very fast, on my backward journey through time, even when all the motions were reversed I once more felt very deeply the compassion his gestures had provoked.

FUTURE OF THE THEATRE

I next went to see a fairfusser, though not one in the service of the government, and was much impressed by his freedom from doubt as to the way in which the best result was to be reached. He said, with justice, that the artist's desire was to communicate with his fellow creatures, and that the object of an actor was to place his soul in touch with that of others. Man, being in each case a unique individual, was fitted for work more noble than that of a mere interpreter, or conduit pipe from an author to an audience, and the contrary view had been the grand error of all producers from the time of Shakespeare almost to his own day. The aim of an actor was to express himself (as a part of universal nature) and reveal a cup overbrimming with passions.

TIMOTHEUS

Any ideas introduced by an author were to be deprecated, for his business was strictly to provide the raw material; and so the teacher's main efforts were to be directed towards training his pupils to rid the authors' words of any meaning they might contain, simply by the manner of speaking them. In this way nothing was allowed to come between the actor and the audience. This he claimed to be the especial discovery of his age, and one of which he could not help regarding with more than a little pride.

I made bold to tell him that his notion was not so new as he imagined, and that we too had actors who disbelieved that words had any plausible meaning apart from the emotion the actor could register through them :

FUTURE OF THE THEATRE

men (as a rule well set up, or even bulky, since these are always the most passionate) who by a clever alteration in stress, or an abrupt cleavage of a sentence in the middle, could effectively cancel any extraneous idea the words of an author might interpose between the feelings of the player and the minds of the audience. This constructor was good enough to say that he was quite sure our age had not been so dark as was commonly supposed, but that, at least in our classical plays, which had been in verse, a form which compels a certain manner of speech, he thought the 'pure' actor must have met with difficulties hardly to be overcome. I was able to assure him that this was not so, and that, indeed, it was just in these very plays many of our actors

TIMOTHEUS

had shown their highest genius ; that one might know *Hamlet*, for example, quite well by the book, and yet go to two or three versions of the play and hardly recognise any of the speeches, so much were they heightened and made subtle in the speaking of them.

I was also much taken by an investigator who had made a highly diverting play simply with scenery, and a few mutes who now and again varied their place. It was his view that we had always been astray in making people the centre of our dramas : it was their surroundings that mattered —for who, he said, given the choice of seeing Brown eat his dinner, or a thunderstorm on Mount Everest, would not prefer to look at Mount Everest ? A modern producer could not help

FUTURE OF THE THEATRE

laughing at the remark of Aristotle, if he ever read it, that 'the spectacle was the least artistic part of a drama.' A comely staircase, he averred, or even a rickety ladder if it was tall enough, had more significance than a tale of hopeless love ; and he was about to design a series of scenes in a logical order of forms and colours, green following pink, which would make a spectator sadder than even a play by Sophocles. This I could well believe : but I found it hard to understand how it was right to allude to pink as though it were a premiss, for after all, nobody dreams of calling a rainbow a syllogism, any more than they do of saying 'paradox' when they mean a hill.

On another day I was taken to see a fairfusser at work on an old-fashioned

TIMOTHEUS

play which was to be ‘acted,’ in our sense of the word, by students. He made his actors rehearse a scene ; and then all sat down on chairs and took up stereoscopic glasses. Immediately, at the other end of the room, two coloured films appeared, exactly reproducing the movements of the actors, while at the same time a gramophone repeated the words they had uttered, in such a manner as to seem to come from the mouth of each actor who spoke. With the glasses the illusion was complete, and I could hardly believe I was not re-dreaming the scene I had just witnessed, except that the producer could stop the play at will, or even go back to a phrase or gesture to point out the errors of voice or movement of which the actors had been guilty. He could

FUTURE OF THE THEATRE

also show how a gesture would be more effective if performed at a greater or less speed ; and how admirable this method was I could judge from the looks of pleasure or mortification on the actors' faces as they saw themselves displayed.

There was one handsome young actor who seemed by his vehemence and assurance to be more talented than the rest, and to him I asked to be introduced, that I might learn his views from him. He led me aside, and with great earnestness explained to me how experience had shown that one could not take for granted the least intelligence in an audience. Words, he said, conveyed nothing to them unless accompanied with appropriate action : and this he ascribed to the fact that an

TIMOTHEUS

audience was a crowd, and therefore followed the normal law of mass psychology in being much stupider and more primitive than a single person. The actor, therefore, had to deal with the simplest objects or ideas, indicating them by a kind of airy drawing. The connection between them, the grammar or the syntax as it were (so he was kind enough to phrase it for my understanding) was portrayed by the actors' emotion as expressed in gesture or tone. That was why plays with few words were better than plays with many words, as in the latter case the number of gestures became very tiring both to the eyes of the audience and the muscles of the actors. He had a noble, yet reasoned, scorn for any player who stood still and

FUTURE OF THE THEATRE

with hardly a movement allowed sentences merely to trundle out of his mouth, and he considered his place could very well be taken by a gramophone.

To illustrate the stages of his art, he took me to a room to see a young actress practise an easy passage, and I was much gratified by the manner in which she expressed by gesture the meaning of the words she was uttering ; and I could not but admire the subtle difference she made in pointing to the floor when she said in one case 'down' meaning merely downstairs, in another the infernal regions. The same variation was introduced in her rendering of 'up,' and I did not fail to note that each gesture emphasised a new beauty in her arms. She also practised some

TIMOTHEUS

'tone-work' as they call it, and for my benefit declaimed an old-fashioned line "To lie in cold obstruction and to rot," and it is hard to imagine, as it is impossible to describe, the frigidity she put into the word 'cold,' or the horror and loathing with which she vivified the word 'rot,' so making their meaning quite clear to any audience.

My actor friend afterwards told me that she had sadly bungled the word 'obstruction,' because she had not yet reached the year in which abstract terms were studied ; and being himself nearly at the conclusion of that period, he gave me a finished version of the line "The quality of mercy is not strained," which quite transported me, and which I should not know how to praise sufficiently. The gesture for 'quality,'

FUTURE OF THE THEATRE

initially too simple, was raised to a high state of complexity by the young man's genius, and I should no doubt have understood it perfectly had I been more used to the method.

I later asked the young woman if such interpretation did not involve work almost too arduous, since nothing is more tiring than to bring one's ideas to the level of common minds ; and she told me that though the intellectual labour was harder than in any other profession, their task was lessened by the fact that so few authors had any idea of what they really meant that the actors could substitute such phrases as lent themselves more readily to their temperament.

There was another actor, with a mobile mouth and masterful manner,

TIMOTHEUS

whom I saw practising for his thirty-third performance of a part, and therefore engaged in working out a thirty-third reading. I was amazed at this, which is so contrary to our own method, but was soon persuaded of its rightness. For a work of art, this actor said, did not exist, apart from the observer—it was a collaboration ; and as no observer was ever twice in the same mood, he could never experience the same sensation from the identical thing. One might say, to adapt the words of an old Greek sophist, “ No man can go to the same play twice.” He then went on to argue very brilliantly that since the actor made the work of art, was indeed himself a piece of it, his share of the collaboration was to make it on each occasion as different as possible from

FUTURE OF THE THEATRE

the last, so as to help any observer who might come more than once to any play. (He knew several ladies who had been to see him no less than seventeen times in the same character). This also had the extra advantage of avoiding that dull monotony—for what is art without an element of surprise?—so often to be seen in our actors, who think they have achieved a final rendering, and attempt day after day to repeat a thing which can never really occur even twice.

I was much satisfied at what I had seen and learnt at the Academy, but was made slightly melancholy by the thought that if ever I should return to my own time, I should find our actors and actresses much below the level of what I had come to expect from their calling.

III

OTHER THEATRES

The National theatre which I have described was not, of course the only kind, though it had many imitators ; and I shall now pass to some others, beginning with that which I think will most interest readers of the present day, but which was rarely mentioned in the polite society of the age. This was the Cathartic Theatre, where people went to be cured of the passion of love. In our day, as has been for many generations past, we often refer to lovesickness, but it is half in jest, and there are few of us who do not think the undoubted pains of the state amply

FUTURE OF THE THEATRE

repaid with its joys. Its dangers, however, now only beginning to be recognised, were fully taken into account in 2,100, for it was seen that the claims of society were incompatible with an emotion then relegated to the songs of derivative poets. Already we know that the battle between the self and the ideal social self gives rise to the most frightful diseases, but in our day we only try to cure the unhealthy symptom instead of going to the root of the matter and abolishing the cause. At this time, though the malady was well in hand, its approaches were so insidious that patients going to a doctor for what they thought was one sickness would often be surprised by a diagnosis which convicted them of love, and would later be seen entering the

TIMOTHEUS

Cathartic Theatre with shamed faces or that air of studied indifference we assume when we do not wish to be noticed, thinking that by this method we shall appear to have no face at all.

The theory of this theatre was very simple ; and this too, I was proud to think, had been foreshadowed by writers of our own time, one of whom had written, "We have lost the orgy, but in its place we have art,"¹ and another "Poetry acts as a physician."² The aim of the performance was to break down the obstacles we wrongly oppose to our thoughts in rude attempts to fit ourselves to social life, and so allow to drain away those impulses which in any really harmonious

¹ Havelock Ellis, *Affirmations*.

² Robert Graves, *Poetic Unreason*.

FUTURE OF THE THEATRE

nature should never be set up. I must warn the reader of this age not to confuse the method with one of 'sublimation' as we say, for this involves the 'will,' a fiction of which the futility had long been exposed. It is true that I did not very clearly grasp these matters, which are too far beyond our time—just as Dryden would, perhaps, have found it hard to grasp the true subtleties of Expressionism—but I hope I do not err in saying that an element of vicarious fulfilment also entered into these dramas, on the ground, which no one will contradict, that it is the function of art to provide what everyday life denies us. The name of the theatre, I found indeed, had arisen from that reading of Aristotle which confuses the meaning of Catharsis

TIMOTHEUS

with that of ‘purgation by excess’ : for even in those days the Faculty of Medecine was not always happy in the names it chose for the ills and remedies it invented.

The authorities were, of course, fully aware of the risks run in using such a specific, and its abuse was hindered in the same way as we curtail the buying of opium and other drugs, which wrongly applied prove harmful ; and a man was only able to buy a ticket if he showed a paper signed by a doctor to declare him a fitting subject. Medical men were themselves allowed to buy as many tickets as they liked, and a large percentage of the audience was always composed of them, because they wished to observe the effects of the cure upon their patients. It was not

FUTURE OF THE THEATRE

without difficulty that Fabian was able to get us the needful pass, and it was only after representing to the authorities that any account of their age which omitted so beneficial a device would be very faulty, that I was granted it.

Before entering the theatre Fabian told me to abandon myself freely to any impulse to laugh, as that was a condition of perfect purging : and of this I was very glad, for I have often, not only before, but since my visit to this time, felt the pain of constraint at light plays, especially if I was with relatives, or else friends with whom I did not wish to become too intimate. But what was my surprise to find, instead of the fescennine jesting I was prepared for, a play I had already seen

TIMOTHEUS

in Manchester, a drama of the most correct sentiment by one of our notably respectable, even titled playwrights, which might call forth smiles and tears alternately, but not those crude outbursts of mirth I now heard on every side. So little was I able to enter into the spirit of the thing that after the first act Fabian took me out, whispering to me that my callous behaviour might have the worst effect upon the patients seated near me. He seemed to think my bearing had been of set purpose, and only grudgingly gave the explanation I longed for, which was that the people in these times saw a wealth of allusion lurking beneath the innocent phrases ; and that what the audience so much relished and admired in our author was the simplicity with which

FUTURE OF THE THEATRE

he had hidden the 'latent content' under the 'manifest.' When I protested my belief that nothing had been more remote from the writer's mind, Fabian looked coldly at me, as though he were sure I was trying to dupe him.

It was in vain that I pleaded with him to be allowed to attend another of these plays, one of later date, for Fabian would by no means recommend me for a pass, saying that the sense would certainly be beyond me. There was, however, another level of play of the same nature, designed for the stupider sort of people, such as members of Parliament, wardens of libraries, teachers in science or religion at the Public Schools, municipal architects and so on, for which, not without a contemptuous word, he recommended

TIMOTHEUS

me. He excused his own absence however ; for even, he said, if he could obtain permission, which he doubted, he would not care to go. And indeed, after I had seen the piece, I could not blame him. For determined as I was, this time, to behave with propriety, I allowed myself the license of which we are all guilty sometimes, when our conscience, or ‘censor’ to use the modern term, is off its guard ; and laughing very heartily, I have since felt ashamed at my acquiescence in a remedy that must prove so greatly worse than the disease. The least things there were such as make us keep some of our Callot etchings locked in a drawer, and to leave certain portions of Mr Loeb’s excellent library in the original tongue, though some I am told,

FUTURE OF THE THEATRE

regard this only as an ingenious device to outwit the laziness of students. At all events, since I was not ill, the performance, I fear, did me no good: whether it would have done so in less happy conditions I am unable to tell, and I dwell upon it no longer, as in any case the experiment will not, I think, be tried in our day, even in the hospitals. Nor would I be convinced of the wisdom of the venture if it were.

In going about the streets I had often noticed, especially in the business quarters, what appeared to be shops or booths, not unlike those places one may see abroad, where men sit in rows to have their boots polished. Above them was displayed a sign on which was written "Two Minutes," or "Thirty Seconds," or some like period of time.

TIMOTHEUS

I had seen the backs of men standing in lines, with pads clamped over their ears and their faces pushed forward into a sort of camera, and had supposed these retreats to be telephone boxes. I was much surprised when Ierne told me they were "Hurry Theatres," and invited me to accompany her to one of them.

They were erected, as the name implies, for those without the leisure to attend longer performances, and were found very beneficial to brokers and such, who, hurrying from their offices to snatch their midday meal, could pause for the declared number of seconds, and gain, without waste of time, a modicum of 'organised emotion,' as Ierne called it; and this was often a great relief to them. For

FUTURE OF THE THEATRE

when we are too much troubled by our affairs we may usefully go to art for escape or refreshment. There were a few booths in the more fashionable parts, for errand boys, journalists, and taxi-drivers, while it was found that those in the dentists' quarter were much patronised : for in going to have our teeth seen to, if we do not like to be late, yet we shrink from entering the place until the last moment, although the waiting rooms are made homely and cheerful with time-tables, comic papers, and copies of Academy pictures. These theatres were also agreeable to those who had arranged to meet friends at a certain spot and were kept waiting, and some had even, in the early days, gained a notoriety as rendezvous.

TIMOTHEUS

The camera through which one looked was simply a stereoscopic glass directed on a double film screen, and the pads were the telephone receivers through which one heard the voices of the actors, which seemed to come from their mouths. The plays themselves were most dramatic in character, since their object was to endue the spectator with a highly disturbing emotion in a minimum of time. They were therefore very allusive, and I should have found it hard to understand many of them if the gestures and tones of the actors had not been profoundly striking. I grew to be fond of them and, indeed, with weakly emotional men, they readily become a vice ; for when thrills are as easily obtained as cocktails, and as rapidly swallowed, if I may use the

FUTURE OF THE THEATRE

term, they form a tonic as difficult to resist as any digestive, and are perhaps as harmful.

It would be useless for me to write down a typical drama, for the reader of to-day would not follow it, nor, for that matter, relish it more than he does those quaint old seventeenth-century plays where women dress up as men, and blood so freely flows. There were, indeed, a few from our own era, known as 'classics,' and sometimes acted as curiosities in the neighbourhood of museums, but the earliest of these must date, I think, from at least 1940, and was a comedy with the strange title *The Psycho-Fans*. A young man wishing to make a girl his bride, she puts him through a number of scientific, but comical tests, to prove his worth

TIMOTHEUS

and his affection : she was afraid, I gathered, that he might turn out to be an ‘introvert,’ and not at all a suitable mate for an ‘extravert’ such as she was. All I remember of the words is the opening of a sort of epilogue he spoke :

Oh had I wist
Before I kissed,
That you were a Behaviourist. . .

Normally, however, these dramas aimed at producing dread, and I naturally avoided one which was advertised as “Guaranteed to make your soul writhe.” We are not yet made of such stern stuff as to derive courage to face the battle of life from art of this sort, though I have seen robust clerks stagger from these booths with

FUTURE OF THE THEATRE

white faces and a much increased zest for their humdrum labours. This being so, I had the temerity to suggest that *one of these theatres might be installed in each government office for the use of civil servants*, and am gratified to be able to say that my proposal was acted upon, only the Inland Revenue Department being excepted.

There was one theatre which several young people told me was the best, but as it did not meet with general favour, I did not go there until the end of my visit, for I have always felt an abhorrence of what is at all precious, and avoided the highbrow and snobbish. It was quite a mean place, not in the capital but in a small provincial town, and was regulated by a fairfusser who had never been able to make his way

TIMOTHEUS

in a decent centre, owing to his poor skill in the art of advertisement.

The stage was much like that which we know, but though built in pleasant enough proportions was too simply decorated to be striking. The settings were so unobtrusive that at the end of a scene one could hardly say whether the framing had been good or bad, which I thought a pity, for one was in this manner robbed of a subject for conversation. The effects were obtained chiefly by the lighting, but unfortunately this was kept uniform throughout each scene, and thus one lost the pleasure of admiring the agility of the electrician, who nowadays, is, with his switches, as great a virtuoso as an organist with his stops. The most noticeable difference was the stage being

FUTURE OF THE THEATRE

only about two-thirds the size of ours, the reason for it that the actors were not people, but puppets, rather smaller than human beings.

I have always regarded these dolls as a mistake, for they must needs be anonymous, and how can one tell if the acting is good if one does not know the name of the performers ? I think too, that if one is to have puppets at all, they should be either grotesque or fairy-like, and these were neither, resembling instead those early Egyptian or Indian sculptures we have so far out-distanced, or those Byzantine paintings, which, once thought beautiful, would look so oddly on the walls of Burlington House. I must confess that their movements were graceful, their deftness above that of any human being, but

TIMOTHEUS

not more so than one could imagine human beings capable of. They were actuated, not by strings, but by some invisible power, and everything they did seemed to be of such happy invention that one felt they had all nature at their command to use. But I detected a grave error in the way the fairfusser made the words issue from their lips, for they did not speak at all like actors, but simply and swiftly, as we all try to do in real life, and it is not for that we go to the theatre. Their speeches were so cadenced that they dwelt in the ear like a harmony in music, which is contrary to all experience, so that the characters did not seem like men ennobled, but, rather, fleshly embodiments of the thought or feeling it was their purpose to express.

FUTURE OF THE THEATRE

One enthusiast, eager to convert me, quoted to me the words of some foreign actress of our time :¹ " To save the Theatre, the Theatre must be destroyed, the actors and actresses must all die of the plague. They poison the air, they make art impossible," which is cruel and absurd, and in any case should not have come from an actress. For these semblances of mankind by their remoteness banished all the accidental things which make a play realistic and warmly human, and all the personal emotion which makes us feel for an actor, and applaud him for the pain he has gone through. But we cannot feel for a puppet, or applaud him, even if he has played King Lear,

¹ Eleonora Duse (Ed.)

TIMOTHEUS

for we know his sufferings were not real.

These plays were always made entirely by one man—for this fairfusser actually had one or two disciples—who directed each movement, whether of single persons or crowds, either tumultuous, or in the dances, which met with much applause, though they seemed to me even less comprehensible than some of the later Russian ballets which were lately in vogue for a short time. I was told he was always very careful about the ‘rhythmic order’ of the piece, whatever that may mean, and its groupings. All was done first on a little model, which in the end became a record repeated on the larger scale. For the voices he took human beings, going over and over each phrase until

FUTURE OF THE THEATRE

he got exactly the tone he wanted, and these he recorded, timing them afterwards with the movements, so that the whole play went, as it were, by clock-work. Thus there was nothing spontaneous about it, and this is a fault, since art, according to many serious philosophers, is a kind of game, and thus, surely, if any notion of being drilled creeps in, the pleasure evaporates.

The same man also, as a rule, wrote the words, which did not remain in my memory because I understood them so little, seeing that they dealt with thoughts and feelings which in our day we take small notice of. That this must be so is easy to see ; for every age concerns itself with a different relation of man to what is outside him. We are

TIMOTHEUS

now, to be sure, beginning to do what they were doing, in dealing with man's relation to man's idea of what he is ; that is, so to say in the plain words of Albertus Magnus, seeking "the causation of causes in the causes of things." But these plays bewildered me, as I own without shame, for would not Dr Johnson himself have been adrift at a play by Signor Pirandello ? And since there was so much I could not fathom, I should only impart a false twist to the meaning however much I tried to give a true account.

But I fear these plays disordered me, for the unnatural is a sort of poison, and I have never since been able to feel real pleasure at any drama of to-day even in the best theatres in Paris, New York, or London. Indeed I have

FUTURE OF THE THEATRE

almost conceived an aversion from our stage ; and it is only the importunities of my friends that make me go to a play once or twice in a year, so as not to seem unsociable. If the choice is left to me, we go to the English version of a French farce, for these are usually free from any meaning at all : and if one expects nothing, one cannot be disappointed.

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